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05 July 2016

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Published Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Scales, Len (2012) 'Re-staging the Reich : the life and times of the Golden Bull (1356).', *Bulletin of international medieval research*, 17/18 . pp. 84-106.

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Review Article

Re-Staging the Reich: The Life and Times of the Golden Bull (1356)

Len Scales

Die Goldene Bulle: Politik – Wahrnehmung – Rezeption. Ed. Ulrike HOHENSEE, Mathias LAWO, Michael LINDNER, Michael MENZEL and Olaf B. RADER. 2 vols. Pp. 1249. Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften: Berichte und Abhandlungen: Sonderband 12. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2009. ISBN 978-3-05-004292-3. £77.40 (hardbound)

Late in 1356, an assembly came together under Emperor Charles IV in the city of Metz, on the western imperial frontier towards France. Among the business transacted was the promulgation of the closing chapters – twenty-four through to thirty-one – of the document which would later come to be known as the Golden Bull. The first twenty-three chapters had already been set down at an assembly held a year before in Nuremberg. Although neither meeting secured the attendance of more than a fairly modest portion of the leading men of the Empire, the events at Metz in particular were to capture the imagination of contemporaries, especially within the German heartlands of the *Reich*.¹ The reasons seem plain enough. Not only was a Roman cardinal among those present at the emperor's court, but the French Dauphin attended and did homage for his imperial fiefs. Above all, proceedings at Metz were encased within ritual forms of striking magnificence and doctrinal potency. Charles himself, in a Christmas custom of his own instigation, read with sword in hand the passage from St Luke's gospel in which Caesar Augustus commands that the whole world be taxed.² The ideological significance of this act was not lost upon the emperor's French guest, who over

twenty years later, as King Charles V, would take steps to prevent his imperial uncle from repeating it on French soil. The hierarchical order of the Empire itself was the subject of equally powerful ritual enactments. At a great banquet staged on the city's main market-place, the Champ-à-Seille, the emperor and empress, seated on a raised platform, received the ceremonial service of the temporal electors, as defined in the Golden Bull's newly-enacted clauses. Reports of these public spectacles underline their power to impress. Yet those same reports, almost without exception, pass in silence over the great constitutional text which was the assembly's most substantial and lasting legacy.

The meeting at Metz also claims particular prominence in a major, two-volume collection of essays on the Golden Bull, published in 2009 but arising from a conference held in 2006 (the 650th anniversary year) under the auspices of the Berlin *Arbeitsstelle* of the Monumenta Germaniae Historica.³ Among the thirty-four substantial pieces one, by Michel Margue and Michel Pauly, is specifically concerned with the place of the city in Charles IV's reign and in the making of the Empire's most famous constitutional text.⁴ However, what took place in Metz is a recurrent theme with other contributors also. The two volumes on the Golden Bull come at an opportune moment for reassessing that document's larger historical significance. The year 2006 brought a further anniversary, the two hundredth of the extinction of the Holy Roman Empire itself. It was the avowed aim of the great two-part exhibition which marked that occurrence (and at which several texts of the Golden Bull were displayed), as well as its accompanying publications, to view in long-term perspective the artefacts of the Empire's history.⁵ The Golden-Bull essays, in similar spirit, adopt a broad, contextualising approach. Indeed, it is the Bull's 'life and times', more than the processes of its making or the details of its content, which provide their subject-matter. Contributions (all of them in German) are organised in four thematic sections: 'Emperor and Empire in the Fourteenth

³ Referenced in what follows as *GB* 1 and *GB* 2.

⁴ M. Margue and M. Pauly, 'Luxemburg, Metz und das Reich: die Reichsstadt Metz im Gesichtsfeld Karls IV.', in *GB* 2: 869-915.

⁵ The Middle Ages (to 1495) were the subject of an exhibition in Magdeburg's Kunsthistorisches Museum. A parallel exhibition covering the early modern period was held in the Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin. For the Magdeburg exhibits and supporting studies, see *Heiliges Römisches Reich Deutscher Nation 962 bis 1806: von Otto dem Großen bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters*, ed. M. Puhle and C.-P. Hasse, 2 vols (*Katalog, Essays*) (Dresden, 2006).

¹ For attendance, see G. Annas, *Hoftag – Gemeiner Tag – Reichstag: Studien zur strukturellen Entwicklung deutscher Reichsversammlungen des späten Mittelalters (1349-1471)* (Göttingen, 2004), 2: 43-66.

² For the development of this ceremony, see H. Heimpel, 'Königlicher Weihnachtsdienst im späteren Mittelalter', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 39 (1983), 131-206.

Century'; the 'Performance and Public Image [*Repräsentation*]' of Charles's Monarchy; 'The Empire and its Neighbours'; and the Bull's 'Reception and [long-term] Influence'. The collection closes with a lucid synthesis of the contributors' findings by Johannes Helmrath. Political communication – and not only in a textual medium – is thus a recurrent theme in these pieces. In this respect, their prominent treatment of the Metz assembly, with its eye-catching pomp and pageantry, represents a straw in winds which can be also seen stirring in other recent publications on the late medieval *Reich*.

I

Traditionally, assessments of the Golden Bull paid more regard to power-politics than to pageantry. Accordingly, attention was concentrated upon the assembly held at Nuremberg between November 1355 and January 1356, where the hard bargaining between emperor and princes, most notably the Rhineland electors, whose outcome the Golden Bull reflected, took place.⁶ Establishing the document's significance for the power of the monarchy, and thus its contribution to long-term processes of state-formation, was a prime objective of nineteenth- and twentieth-century German scholarship. Judgements on the Bull and its wider influence, moreover, were inextricably bound up with assessments of the intentions of Charles IV in its making, of the extent of his success, and of his character and historical importance as a ruler.

Opinion on these matters always differed. Broad consensus was confined to two general conclusions. The first was that the Golden Bull had played a part in stabilising constitutional processes, and thus political affairs, in late medieval Germany. The second was that this stability was achieved in a manner which circumscribed the power of the monarchy and constrained its capacity for future growth, while greatly strengthening that of the territorial princes, with the electors foremost among them.⁷ Whose perspective and interests the document principally

⁶ For the Nuremberg chapters, see: K. Zeumer, *Die Goldene Bulle Kaiser Karls IV.*, 1 (*Entstehung und Bedeutung der Goldenen Bulle*) (Weimar, 1908), pp. 116–51; H. Stob, *Kaiser Karl IV. und seine Zeit* (Graz, 1990), pp. 97–100. For the negotiations, see esp. B.-U. Hergemöller, *Fürsten, Herren und Städte zu Nürnberg 1355/56: Die Entstehung der "Goldenen Bulle" Karls IV.* (Köln, 1983), ch. 5.

⁷ For example: J. Haller, *Die Epochen der deutschen Geschichte*, new edn (Stuttgart, 1935), p. 107; G. Barraclough, *The Origins of Modern Germany*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1947), pp. 316–19; H. Grundmann, *Wahlkönigtum, Territorialpolitik und*

reflected has, however, been variously assessed.⁸ For Karl Zeumer, in his still valuable monograph of 1908, the Golden Bull was a work of imperial legislation, expressing 'the consistent will of the legislator', Charles himself.⁹ Subsequent studies, by contrast, have given much weight to evidence which indicates that the emperor had come to Nuremberg with aims that were to be only very imperfectly realised in the text which eventually emerged.¹⁰ Far from being a general work of imperial law, some have therefore argued, the Bull, in its origins, was fundamentally a privilege – or, perhaps better, a bundle of individual privileges – in favour of the electors (of whom Charles himself was, of course, one, and whose Bohemian kingdom was especially generously favoured).

By the close of the twentieth century, however, a more nuanced, intermediate judgement, associated particularly with the work of Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller, had come to command widespread assent.¹¹ From this viewpoint, the document represented a 'compromise' which, while it did indeed prominently serve the electors' interests, nevertheless also reflected Charles's perspective and priorities as emperor.¹² On this

Ostbewegung im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert, Gebhardt's Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte, pbk edn, 5 (München, 1973), pp. 227–29.

⁸ For bibliographic orientation, see: A. Wolf, 'Goldene Bulle v. 1356', in *Lexikon des Mittelalters* 4 (München, 1988), cols. 1542–43; and, most recently, M. Lindner, 'Die Goldene Bulle Kaiser Karls IV.', in *Heiliges Römisches Reich: Essays*, ed. Puhle and Hasse, pp. 311–21.

⁹ K. Zeumer, *Die Goldene Bulle*, p. 184.

¹⁰ E.L. Petersen, 'Studien zur goldenen Bulle von 1356', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 22 (1966), 227–53: 'Ein Werk Karls IV. kann die G.B. also schwerlich genannt werden'. Instead, it marked the scuppering of the emperor's reform plans, to the benefit of the *Kurfürstenoligarchie*. (Petersen, 'Studien zur goldenen Bulle von 1356', p. 253.) The emphasis is also firmly upon the limits of Charles's achievements and the dominance of the electors' interests in H. Thomas, *Deutsche Geschichte des Spätmittelalters* (Stuttgart, 1983), pp. 240–43.

¹¹ Hergemöller, *Fürsten, Herren und Städte*. And see: A. Wolf, 'Das "Kaiserliche Rechtbuch" Karls IV. (sogenannte Goldene Bulle)', *Ius Commune* 2 (1969), 1–32; W. Dotzauer, 'Überlegungen zur Goldenen Bulle Kaiser Karls IV. unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des rechtlichen Hintergrundes', in *Landesgeschichte und Rechtsgeschichte: Festschrift für Alois Gerlich zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. W. Dotzauer, W. Kleiber, M. Matheus and K.-H. Spieß (Stuttgart, 1993), pp. 165–93.

¹² On its 'compromise' character, see also: P. Moraw, *Von offener Verfassung zu gestalteter Verdichtung: Das Reich im späteren Mittelalter, 1250 bis 1490* (Berlin, 1985), pp. 247–49; H. Boockmann, *Stauferzeit und spätes Mittelalter: Deutschland 1125–1517* (Berlin, 1998), pp. 267–71.

assessment, the Bull was an accommodation between the monarch and his fellow-electors, at the expense above all of the imperial towns, whose interests Charles abandoned to the princes. As such, it exemplified the Luxemburger's mastery of 'the art of the possible'.¹³

An element particularly emphasised in older accounts, but one which has never lost its interest for commentators, relates to what the Bull, amid all its detailed provisions for electing the monarch, conspicuously omits to mention: the role of the pope.¹⁴ The absence was all the more noteworthy in light of the prominent (and disruptive) part which papal claims to approve the electors' choice for the imperial throne had played in German politics during the preceding century. Indeed, on some views a generous accommodation with the electors was part of the price which Charles was prepared to pay in order to rid Germany of 'the incubus of papal interference'.¹⁵ Here, for a tradition of historiography deeply concerned with the impact of medieval imperial history upon German state-formation, was one of the emperor's more notable successes. Charles had succeeded, moreover, where the more confrontational approach of his Wittelsbach predecessor, Ludwig IV (r. 1314-47), had not. Whereas Ludwig had openly denied the papal power of ratification (as also had the electors, at Rhens in 1338), the Golden Bull simply ignored it. It did so, moreover, without challenge from the Curia, which henceforth was to have no substantive part in choosing the monarch. To many historians since the nineteenth century, the approach taken by the Golden Bull exemplified not only Charles's aversion to open conflict but also one of his personal strengths as a ruler: his *Staatskunst*.¹⁶ In some more recent works, however, praise for the emperor's statesmanship has been accompanied by a new emphasis upon the similarities in outlook and approach between Charles and his predecessor Ludwig – in their sense of majesty and in the manner of its presentation, in their actions as imperial legislators, as well as in their shared belief in the Empire's con-

¹³ B.-U. Hergemöller, 'Die Goldene Bulle – Karl IV. und die Kunst des Möglichen', in *Kaiser Karl IV.: Staatsmann und Mäzen*, ed. F. Seibt (München, 1978), pp. 143-46.

¹⁴ J. Miethke, 'Die päpstliche Kurie des 14. Jahrhunderts und die "Goldene Bulle" Kaiser Karls IV. von 1356', in *Papstgeschichte und Landesgeschichte: Festschrift für Hermann Jakobs zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. J. Dahlhaus and A. Kohnle (Köln, 1995), pp. 437-50; and for a recent overview, H.J. Mierau, *Kaiser und Papst im Mittelalter* (Köln, 2010), pp. 134-46. Among older accounts, see esp. Zeumer, *Die Goldene Bulle*, pp. 191-95.

¹⁵ Barraclough, *Origins of Modern Germany*, p. 318.

¹⁶ D. Schäfer, *Deutsche Geschichte*, 1 (Jena, 1921), p. 377.

stitutional independence.¹⁷ This revived stress upon Charles's agency and on his own vision of rule, it will become clear, is among the more salient features of the Golden-Bull essay volumes.

Charles IV himself has long divided historical opinion. Even individual historians are to be found returning mixed judgements. Already in the mid-eighteenth century, Johann Daniel Olenschlager was moved to wonder at the emperor's extraordinary intellectual capabilities while also condemning what he identified as Charles's miserliness, egotism and lust for power. Indeed, ambivalence and polarisation already characterised the verdicts passed on the emperor by his contemporaries and by subsequent late-medieval commentators.¹⁸ On the whole, German medievalists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries could muster little enthusiasm for a monarch whose style of rule appeared entirely to shun the heroism and the stirring martial feats of their beloved high-medieval *Kaiserzeit*.¹⁹ His was instead a prosaic nature, 'averse to all adventurous plans and indeterminate goals'.²⁰ Yet the general coolness towards Charles was from an early date combined with a somewhat grudging acknowledgement of important positive qualities, notably his famed diplomatic skill.²¹ Czech historians, by contrast, had traditionally celebrated him as one of their people's greatest rulers: a Bohemian king who put his hereditary kingdom first – a judgement which was extended to their reading of the Golden Bull, with its clauses safeguarding Bohemia's special distinctions.²²

¹⁷ Thus S. Weinfurter, *Das Reich im Mittelalter: Kleine deutsche Geschichte von 500 bis 1500* (München, 2008), p. 200.

¹⁸ For Charles's contemporary image, see: B. Frey, *Pater Bohemiae – Vitricus Imperii: Böhmens Vater, Stiefvater des Reichs: Kaiser Karl IV. in der Geschichtsschreibung* (Bern, 1978); H. Herkommer, 'Kritik und Panegyrik: zum literarischen Bild Karls IV. (1346-1378)', *Rheinische Vierteljahresblätter* 44 (1980), 68-116.

¹⁹ For example, Haller, *Epochen*, p. 118 (while also acknowledging (p. 109) that Charles's age was nevertheless more 'interesting' than that of the Staufer for anyone wishing to understand the long-term course of German history).

²⁰ A. Huber, 'Karl IV.', in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* 15 (Leipzig, 1882), p. 166.

²¹ Emphasized already in the nineteenth century, e.g., by the Bohemian-German Constantin Höfler: B. Frey, 'Karl IV. in der älteren Historiographie', in *Kaiser Karl IV.*, ed. Seibt, pp. 402-03; and see also Huber, 'Karl IV.', p. 167.

²² For example, J. Spěvaček, *Karl IV.: Sein Leben und seine staatsmännische Leistung*, trans. A. Dressler (Praha, 1978), pp. 124-25; and see more generally H. Lemberg, 'Der Kaiser und König im tschechischen Geschichtsbild', in *Kaiser Karl IV.*, ed. Seibt, pp. 414-17.

Only in the later twentieth century did Charles's reputation start to plot a steep upward course in German historiography also, in an age now more disposed to celebrate the pacific than the warlike arts of medieval rulership. The anniversary of his death in 1978, tapping a burgeoning interest within the German universities in the late Middle Ages more broadly, brought forth a remarkable quantity of publications on the Luxemburger and his times.²³ What emerged, however, was less a new vision of Charles than a more positive evaluation of the familiar one, reflecting the sensitivities and agendas of Cold-War central Europe. The emperor was, according to Ferdinand Seibt, the author of the most significant biography from the period, a 'constructive conservative', who had applied a 'calculating, rational conception of rulership'.²⁴ A pragmatist and no ideologue, his main objective was stability. While Seibt's judgements were in some respects coloured by West German politics of the time, views of Charles from the Communist DDR were not always very different.²⁵ Only in one respect did the late 1970s bring a significant change of perspective, at least in the West. In place of the Germano-centric concerns of old, directed towards the long-term course of

²³ For publication surveys, see: P. Moraw, 'Kaiser Karl IV. 1378-1978: Ertrag und Konsequenzen eines Gedenkjahres', in *Politik, Gesellschaft, Geschichtsschreibung: Gießener Festgabe für František Graus zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. H. Ludat and R.C. Schwinges (Köln, 1982), 224-318; F. Graus, 'Kaiser Karl IV.: Betrachtungen zur Literatur eines Jubiläumsjahres (1378/1978)', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 28 (1980), 71-88. On the rise of the late Middle Ages as a field of study in the late twentieth century, see P. Johanek, 'Zu neuen Ufern? Beobachtungen eines Zeitgenossen zur deutschen Mediävistik von 1975 bis heute', in *Die deutschsprachige Mediävistik im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. P. Moraw and R. Schieffer (Ostfildern, 2005), pp. 139-74. For the marking of the anniversary itself see, in addition to the catalogue to the Nuremberg exhibition on Charles IV (*Kaiser Karl IV.*, ed. Seibt), that for the Cologne exhibition on his court architects and artists, the Parler: *Die Parler und der schöne Stil 1350-1400: europäische Kunst unter den Luxemburgern*, ed. A. Legner, 3 vols. (Köln, 1978).

²⁴ F. Seibt, 'Karl IV.', in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 11 (Berlin, 1977), pp. 188-89; F. Seibt, *Karl IV.: Ein Kaiser in Europa 1346 bis 1378* (München, 1978). For a comparable view, see also H. Patze, 'Karl IV.: Kaiser im Spätmittelalter', *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte* 116 (1980), 67.

²⁵ E. Müller-Mertens, 'Kaiser Karl IV. 1346-1378: Herausforderung zur Wertung einer geschichtlichen Persönlichkeit', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 27 (1979), 340-56 (for his 'conservatism', 345). For the role of West German politics in the 1978 anniversary, see: Moraw, 'Kaiser Karl IV.', pp. 284-86; E. Straub, 'Viel Lärm um Karl: Die Rückkehr Karls IV. auf die Nürnberger Burg', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 19 June 1978, p. 23.

German constitutional development, Charles was now increasingly viewed (and celebrated) within a European framework: as an 'emperor in Europe', as a builder of bridges between east and west, or even as a 'European prince of peace'.²⁶ By the close of the twentieth century, completion of the MGH's *Constitutiones* series for Charles's reign had significantly extended the corpus of readily-accessible sources for its study and stimulated a further upsurge in scholarly attention for the Luxemburger.²⁷

II

The two Golden Bull volumes in several respects reinforce the pre-occupations and conclusions of recent work on the Bull and on Charles's reign more generally, but they also take matters further. About the document's making and its detailed content the contributors have surprisingly little to say. Paul-Joachim Heinig, in a study of the role of the Rhineland electors in its origins, emphasises the complexity of the factors conditioning the Bull's content, the role of the contingent, and the traces left in the finalised clauses by specific matters of concern to particular electors.²⁸ Even the core, Rhineland group emerges as internally divided. Heinig's essay apart, however, the obscure processes of political bargaining which traditionally so absorbed students of the Golden Bull receive scant notice here. This may be because, in the absence of fresh evidence, there currently seems little new to say; but it clearly also reflects a major recent shift in scholarly interests and perspectives.

By and large, the prevalent modern view of the Bull's character, as a compromise between the emperor and his fellow-electors, is reaffirmed in these essays. However, this is now combined with a recurrent emphasis upon its significance as a legal text and on Charles's own

²⁶ Thus O. Habsburg, *Karl IV.: Ein europäischer Friedensfürst* (München, 1978). For the theme of 'Europe', see Moraw, 'Kaiser Karl IV.', p. 269. According to Seibt, Charles's policy towards Lithuania was aimed at peacefully integrating the pagan empire 'in den abendländischen Kulturkreis': Seibt, *Karl IV.*, p. 380.

²⁷ *Kaiser, Reich und Region: Studien und Texte aus der Arbeit an den Constitutiones des 14. Jahrhunderts und zur Geschichte der Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, ed. M. Lindner, E. Müller-Mertens and O.B. Rader (Berlin, 1997).

²⁸ P.-J. Heinig, 'Solide bases imperii et colume immobiles? Die geistlichen Kurfürsten und der Reichsepiskopat um die Mitte des 14. Jahrhunderts', in *GB* 1, pp. 65-91.

importance as a legislator. It was, as Claudia Garnier (quoting Ernst Schubert) phrases it, 'a compromise that the emperor wanted'.²⁹ Foundations for such an assessment are laid in the opening contributions, by Jean-Marie Moeglin and Michael Menzel.³⁰ Moeglin examines the contemporary and posthumous reputation of Charles's predecessor Ludwig IV as a lawmaker, while Menzel uncovers widespread traces of Ludovician texts and principles in the Golden Bull itself. As Menzel cogently argues, Charles was Ludwig's direct ideological heir to a degree that his bitter polemics against his excommunicate forebear and rival have tended to obscure.

Others draw attention to the resources which Charles himself and those around him brought to the Bull's making. Eva Schlotheuber assesses the personal capacities which earned the emperor, among some contemporaries at least, such a formidable reputation as a judge.³¹ According to those close to him, Charles combined a talent for persuasive argument with a rare quickness and confidence in judgement, in which he was capable of leaving his counsellors far behind. The emperor's intellectual formation, rooted in the Paris schools of his youth, was unusually extensive.³² His famed linguistic powers no doubt helped him to make a favourable impression upon non-German commentators, such as the chronicler Matteo Villani.

More than one contributor emphasises the central importance of the mid-1350s, the period of the Bull's framing, to the ideological construction of Charles's monarchy. This was greatly enriched, first of all, simply by the fact of his coronation in Rome at Easter 1355: when he returned to Germany later in the same year it was as the first generally-recognised Roman emperor to set foot there for nearly 120 years. But other elements too now came together to add shape and depth to the emperor's self-presentation in the north. Some of these were linked to his Italian forays. As Robert Suckale demonstrates, the visual presentation of Charles's majesty changed in response to his time in the south,

²⁹ C. Garnier, 'Die Ordnung des Reiches: die Position des Herrschers in der Goldenen Bulle in der Wahrnehmung bis 1400', in *GB* 1: 197-240 (here p. 202).

³⁰ J.-M. Moeglin, 'Das Erbe Ludwigs des Bayern' and M. Menzel, 'Feindliche Übernahme: Die ludovicianischen Züge der Goldenen Bulle', in *GB* 1: 17-38, 39-63.

³¹ E. Schlotheuber, 'Die Rolle des Rechts in der Herrschaftsauffassung Kaiser Karls IV.', in *GB* 1: 141-68.

³² Examined in Seibt, *Karl IV.*, ch. 4.

just as did that of Ludwig IV in the wake of his controversial coronation at Rome in 1328.³³ Jiří Fajt underlines the importance of the mid-1350s to the establishment of a distinctive Caroline court style in the visual arts and to the development of a consistent iconography for representing the monarch.³⁴ A central part in formulating Charles's conception of rule was taken by his learned, capable and long-serving chancellor Johann von Neumarkt, whose ascendancy at court also began at this time.³⁵ And as Michael Lindner emphasises, in one of his two contributions to this collection, the 1350s also brought the entry into Charles's circle of learned men previously close to the emperor's great-uncle, Archbishop Balduin of Trier.³⁶ Balduin's circle had served as an intellectual powerhouse for opposition to the political doctrines of the Avignon Curia in the reign of Ludwig IV. That it is from the time when members of the archbishop's learned network enter Charles's orbit that new notes of imperial universalism become prominent in the writings, rituals and monuments of his court is, as Lindner points out, unlikely to be coincidence.

Read in the light of such developments, the Golden Bull itself appears more an enactment of imperial majesty than the abject capitulation before princely particularism that some older views discerned. Dietmar Willoweit thus draws attention to the importance of Roman and canon law in Charles's great constitution.³⁷ If some elements in it addressed the interests of the electors, others bore the clear marks of imperial authority. In insisting that the temporal electorates descend by primogeniture and forbidding divisions of the electors' lands, the Golden Bull placed sharp constraints upon customary dynastic practices.³⁸ Here the hand of the imperial legislator is seen at work. However, as a number of contributors are at pains to argue, it was particularly through its provisions for the visual, ritual enactment of monarchy that this document,

³³ R. Suckale, 'Zur Ikonografie der deutschen Herrscher des 14. Jahrhunderts: Rudolf I. – Ludwig IV. – Karl IV.', in *GB* 1: 327-48.

³⁴ J. Fajt, 'Was ist karolinisch an der Hofkunst Karls IV.?', in *GB* 1: 349-68.

³⁵ See generally W. Höver, 'Johann von Neumarkt', in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon* 4, ed. K. Ruh (Berlin, 1983), cols. 686-95.

³⁶ M. Lindner, 'Es war an der Zeit: die Goldene Bulle in der politischen Praxis Kaiser Karls IV.', in *GB* 1: 93-140 (here pp. 116-18).

³⁷ D. Willoweit, 'Römisches Recht, Gewohnheitsrecht und Politik im Reich und in den Territorien (12.-15. Jahrhundert)', in *GB* 1: 241-57.

³⁸ Willoweit, 'Römisches Recht, Gewohnheitsrecht und Politik im Reich und in den Territorien (12.-15. Jahrhundert)', pp. 255-56.

like Caroline court culture more broadly, raised up the emperor high above all others within his *Reich*.

III

The tendency which these essays display, towards reinstating the emperor as a central and active figure in the Bull's making, is part of a larger pattern of emphasising Charles's agency and the role of his own capabilities in defining his monarchy. This emphasis is in its turn underpinned by the heavy concentration of these two volumes upon his image as king and emperor, and particularly on the role of non-textual media in its articulation. This marks one of the most novel and distinctive elements in the approach taken by these pieces to the Golden Bull and its contexts. It is not only under the heading of 'Performance and Public Image' that these themes are addressed, although that section alone contains ten substantial essays. The range of media considered is itself remarkably wide, encompassing not only rituals and ceremonies, paintings, sculpture, metalwork and architecture (each the subject of recurrent reference), but more specific genres such as relics (Wolfgang Schmid) and coins (Torsten Fried).³⁹ Writings from the Caroline court, both pragmatic and more literary, are also surveyed (by Mathias Lawo and Martin Schubert).⁴⁰

Here, the contributors reflect and build upon a trend which has been prominent in recent studies of the political culture of the late medieval *Reich*, which have brought a new concentration upon its articulation in ritual – through the monarch's itinerary, for example, through face-to-face interactions with other rulers, or through burial practices.⁴¹ The role of the visual arts in the service of late-medieval emperorship has also

³⁹ W. Schmid, 'Vom Rheinland nach Böhmen: Studien zur Reliquienpolitik Kaiser Karls IV.', in *GB* 1: 431–64; T. Fried, 'Schnöder Mammon oder Repräsentationsobjekt? Kaiserliche und kurfürstliche Münzen zu Zeiten der Goldenen Bulle', in *GB* 1: 465–91.

⁴⁰ M. Schubert, 'Inszenierung und Repräsentation von Herrschaft: Karl IV. in der Literatur' in *GB* 1: 493–516; M. Lawo, 'Sprachen der Macht – Sprache als Macht: Urkundensprachen im Reich des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts', in *GB* 1: 517–50.

⁴¹ G.J. Schenk, *Zeremoniell und Politik: Herrschereinzüge im spätmittelalterlichen Reich* (Köln, 2003); G. Schwedler, *Herrschartreffen des Spätmittelalters: Formen – Rituale – Wirkungen* (Ostfildern, 2008); R.J. Meyer, *Königs- und Kaiserbegräbnisse im Spätmittelalter* (Köln, 2000). See also *Die Bildlichkeit symbolischer Akte*, ed. B. Stollberg-Rilinger and T. Weißbrich (Münster, 2010).

attracted much scrutiny.⁴² Part of the explanation for this trend lies with the tendency in recent decades for intensified bursts of scholarship on the *Reich* to take their cue from prominent anniversaries and to be linked to the sumptuous exhibitions of medieval artefacts to which these invariably give rise.⁴³ Both of the milestone years of recent times for reassessment of Charles IV (1978, and now 2006) were marked by this conjunction. More fundamentally, however, recent accounts of the Empire's political culture attest to the impact of the 'medial turn' upon Medieval Studies in general. More specifically, they reflect the spreading influence of the work of prominent early medievalists, notably Gerd Althoff, who have powerfully highlighted the performative elements in medieval political life.⁴⁴ The late medieval *Reich*, which retained, in European comparison, a markedly archaic quality, with limited institutionalisation and bureaucratisation and widespread application of

⁴² As examples: R. Suckale, *Die Hofkultur Kaiser Ludwigs des Bayern* (München, 1993); I. Rosario, *Art and Propaganda: Charles IV of Bohemia, 1346–1378* (Woodbridge, 2000); P. Crossley, 'The Politics of Presentation: The Architecture of Charles IV in Bohemia', in *Courts and Regions in Medieval Europe*, ed. S. Rees Jones, R. Marks and A.J. Minnis (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 99–172; L. Scales, 'The Illuminated Reich: Memory, Crisis, and the Visibility of Monarchy in Late Medieval Germany', in *The Holy Roman Empire, Reconsidered*, ed. J.P. Coy, B. Marschke and D. W. Sabeau (New York, 2010), pp. 73–92.

⁴³ Alongside the two volumes to the 2006 Magdeburg exhibition (*Heiliges Römisches Reich*, ed. Puhle and Hasse), see thus the accompanying conference proceedings: *Heilig – Römisch – Deutsch: Das Reich im mittelalterlichen Europa*, ed. B. Schneidmüller and S. Weinfurter (Dresden, 2006). Similarly: *Die Kaisermacher: Frankfurt am Main und die Goldene Bulle 1356–1806 (Katalogband)*, ed. E. Brockhoff, J. Gerchow and R. Gross with *Aufsätze*, ed. E. Brockhoff and M. Matthäus (Frankfurt am Main, 2006); *Sigismundus Rex et Imperator: Kunst und Kultur zur Zeit Sigismunds von Luxemburg 1387–1437: Ausstellungskatalog*, ed. I. Takács (Mainz, 2006), together with *Sigismund von Luxemburg: Ein Kaiser in Europa*, ed. M. Pauly and F. Reinert (Mainz, 2006); *Karl IV. – Kaiser von Gottes Gnaden: Kunst und Repräsentation des Hauses Luxemburg 1347–1437*, ed. J. Fajt (München, 2007), with essays in *Kunst als Herrschaftsinstrument: Böhmen und das Heilige Römische Reich unter den Luxemburgern im europäischen Kontext*, ed. J. Fajt and A. Langer (München, 2009). As a further example of artefacts providing stimulus for discussion of pre-modern political communications, see *Spektakel der Macht: Rituale im alten Europa 800–1800: Katalog*, ed. B. Stollberg-Rilinger, M. Puhle, J. Götzmann and G. Althoff (Darmstadt, 2008).

⁴⁴ G. Althoff, *Die Macht der Rituale: Symbolik und Herrschaft im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt, 2003); see the review by L. Scales in *Early Medieval Europe* 13 (2005), 298–301.

ceremony and ritual, has appeared particularly well suited to study from this perspective.⁴⁵

That it offers a fruitful direction from which to approach the Golden Bull – which is, after all, before all else a *text* – must at first sight appear more surprising. However, as the contributors to these volumes repeatedly remind the reader, it is a text concerned above all with stabilising and choreographing key constitutional *rituals*: those for creating the Empire's ruler and for his public interactions with his creators, the electors. As Claudia Garnier argues, far from forming a mere decorative adjunct to the serious business of the Bull's promulgation, as older views tended to suppose, the ritual round which marked particularly the Metz assembly constituted its public enactment.⁴⁶ Too long and complex to be proclaimed verbally, the Golden Bull was instead *performed*, since performance lay at its heart. And it was a performance which contemporaries well understood: in recording the spectacle staged at Metz, chroniclers gave evidence of their reception of the Bull itself.⁴⁷ As Bernd Schneidmüller here insists, it was only through enactment in ritual that constitutional notions – indeed, the imperial monarchy itself – attained live substance: 'Thus the *Reich* was not cast in mere abstract words and concepts but was conjured into being through pictures and mental images. It was seen, felt and sensed – when sitting, processing, serving'.⁴⁸

Viewing the Golden Bull in these terms makes a great deal of sense.⁴⁹ But it also tends to result in a more unambiguously impressive picture both of the imperial monarchy and of Charles IV than was once customary. Rituals and ceremonies were designed to impress: that was their point. Those which took as their object the Empire and its ruler were contrived so as to magnify their prestige. It is therefore understandable that, observed in ritual garb, the late medieval *Reich* appears a more remarkable thing than when judged under certain other con-

⁴⁵ The approach is extended into the early modern period in B. Stollberg-Rilinger, *Des Kaisers alte Kleider: Verfassungsgeschichte und Symbolsprache des Alten Reiches* (München, 2008).

⁴⁶ Garnier, 'Die Ordnung des Reiches', pp. 237–38.

⁴⁷ Garnier, 'Die Ordnung des Reiches', p. 214.

⁴⁸ B. Schneidmüller, 'Inszenierungen und Rituale des spätmittelalterlichen Reichs: die Goldene Bulle von 1356 in westeuropäischen Vergleichen', in *GB* 1: 261–97 (here p. 263).

⁴⁹ For this, see also J. Kunisch, 'Formen symbolischen Handelns in der Goldenen Bulle von 1356', in *Vormoderne politische Verfahren*, ed. B. Stollberg-Rilinger (Berlin, 2001), pp. 263–80.

ceivable headings – such as its ruler's annual income, for example, or the size of his military forces. Above all, the Golden Bull's rituals, and those which attended its promulgation, exalted the monarch himself. It was he who received at table the closely-defined services of his greatest temporal princes, just as he appeared in solemn state at Metz to read from the Christmas gospel or to bestow numerous imperial fiefs. There are signs that Charles took steps to ensure that the spectacle of monarchy would have no rival: the electors were specifically forbidden to host lavish entertainments of their own during the assembly.⁵⁰

It is their concentration upon the performative aspects of the Golden Bull, and on the communicative and image-making dimensions of his reign more broadly, that most explains Charles's enhanced profile in these volumes. Here, the worthy-but-dull conservative realist of the 1978 retrospectives is transformed into an all-controlling impresario of the sacral. It is not hard to find justification for such a view. As more than one contributor points out, there is ample evidence to show that Charles's extensive cultural patronage was guided not only by strong aesthetic judgements, but by a consistent political vision. The king-emperor was intimately involved in his own representation. It was he above all who was responsible for bringing artists from far and wide to his court to work on his image-making projects. His confident command of ecclesiastical Latin not only enabled Charles to set down an account of his own early life, but also to play a part in the creation of a new *vita* of the Bohemian patron, St Wenceslas. He participated actively in the crafting of ritual, including even his own coronation *ordo*, as Lenka Bobková explains, in an essay concentrating on his provisions for his Bohemian kingdom.⁵¹ The animated Golden Bull of these volumes, a Golden Bull of movement, gesture and performance, is therefore also one which places the emperor, not the electors, centre-stage.

IV

Charles IV was a monarch with a rare capacity, but evidently also a particular need, to communicate politically, in a range of media and with a range of subject groups, within his hereditary lands and in the *Reich* at large. He was, as the reader of these essays is repeatedly reminded, a masterly practitioner of 'propaganda'. But what was he seeking to

⁵⁰ Garnier, 'Die Ordnung des Reiches', pp. 216–19.

⁵¹ L. Bobková, 'Die Goldene Bulle und die Rechtsverfügungen Karls IV. für das Königreich Böhmen in den Jahren 1346–1356', in *GB* 2: 713–35 (here pp. 714–16).

propagate, and to whom – and, most importantly, with what success? The answers to these questions must inevitably colour the judgements passed on that central communicative text, the Golden Bull.

Several contributors identify the political elite of his Bohemian kingdom as a prime intended audience for their king's self-representation. Olaf B. Rader explains how he planned the creation and location of funerary monuments in his rebuilt St Vitus cathedral in order clearly to portray himself as heir to Bohemia's ancient ruling dynasty, the Přemyslids – and thus, to St Wenceslas himself.⁵² As Wolfgang Schmid shows, Charles's tireless relic-collecting in the Empire's western borderlands served above all to allow him to pile up sacred objects before Bohemian eyes.⁵³ Richard Némec, meanwhile, interprets the extensive programme of carved armorials set up in the castle at Lauf, east of Nuremberg on the road to Prague, as conceived above all with the purpose of reconciling the Bohemian high nobility to Luxemburg rule.⁵⁴

What, then, was the outcome of these extensive – and expensive – 'propaganda' endeavours? It is one of the seeming ironies of Charles's legacy that a ruler so exceptionally preoccupied with his own visibility and commemoration left behind no funerary monument of his own to survive into modern times. A tomb certainly once existed, prominently placed in the choir of St Vitus; but within little more than a generation of his death it had evidently been smashed by Hussite iconoclasts, natives of his own Bohemian kingdom.⁵⁵ To the indigenous elites of his realm, the scion of the house of Luxemburg could never appear a true heir to the Bohemian past. The year of Charles's imperial coronation, the year in which the groundwork was laid for the Golden Bull, also saw another, yet more ambitious, work of Caroline legislation – the *Maiestas Carolina*, codifying Bohemian customary law – ignominiously rejected by the estates of the realm. Even the power of presentation was, it seems, not unlimited.

Rituals were only persuasive when their audiences were prepared to accept the fundamental political claims which they sought to enact: they could not legitimise that which was otherwise perceived as illegitimate.

⁵² O.B. Rader, 'Aufgeräumte Herkunft: Zur Konstruktion dynastischer Ursprünge an königlichen Begräbnisstätten', in *GB* 1: 403–30.

⁵³ Schmid, 'Vom Rheinland', esp. pp. 462–63.

⁵⁴ R. Némec, 'Herrscher – Kunst – Metapher: Das ikonografische Programm der Residenzburg Lauf an der Pegnitz als eine Quelle der Herrschaftsstrategie Karls IV.', in *GB* 1: 369–401 (here esp. p. 386).

⁵⁵ Rader, 'Aufgeräumte Herkunft', pp. 422–24.

And for all his mastery of the arts of *Inszenierung*, it was not only in Charles's hands that ritual showed itself a powerful resource. When the emperor came to Cologne in February 1357, the town pointedly withheld from him the customary ceremonial reception, angry both at his privileges immoderately favouring their archbishop and, it seems, at the anti-urban provisions of the Golden Bull itself.⁵⁶ Charles's own furious reaction soon forced the burghers to relent, but the point had been made. The souring of relations with the Rhineland metropolis looks forward to the more general breakdown of trust between the emperor and the imperial towns which was to mark his final decade on the throne. Given their unifying theme, the backgrounds of their authors and the direction of current scholarship, it is understandable that these essays should view Charles primarily in an imperial (rather than dynastic-territorial) setting, in ritual dress (rather than amid the hurly-burly of events), and at the height of his power and prestige in 1356. The result, however, is to impute to him rather more agency and more consistency of purpose than the long course of his reign and its complex, ambivalent legacy appear to warrant.

V

The history of the Golden Bull as text, as other contributors to these volumes show, was far from being one of central direction and control. For a general regulation of the Empire's constitutional and ritual order, Charles's constitution enjoyed a remarkably modest initial dissemination. Only four full exemplars were at first given out, to the Rhineland electors. The king of Bohemia himself took home a sealed original of only the Nuremberg chapters, in which his kingdom's privileges were recorded. Two further sealed originals were issued some years later, for the towns of Frankfurt and Nuremberg (each of which had a special standing in the Bull). Although, as Michael Lindner demonstrates, its existence seems to have been surprisingly widely known in Germany from early on, this was not the result of its circulation in exemplars sent out from the imperial chancery, but of more varied and informal communications.⁵⁷ The widespread fame which, over the course of subsequent decades, the document gradually attained, was not primarily a reflection of its official issue under the imperial seal. Instead, it was nourished by the numerous copies (173 of which we have

⁵⁶ M. Lindner, "'Theatrum praeeminentiae': Kaiser und Reich zur Zeit der Goldenen Bulle", in *GB* 1: 169–95 (here p. 194).

⁵⁷ For early references, see Lindner, 'Es war an der Zeit', pp. 93–97.

knowledge, down to the end of the Middle Ages alone) which were made at various times and places, by diverse hands and for assorted reasons.⁵⁸ Whether or not Charles IV really pursued the ambitious 'propaganda' objectives often claimed, the Golden Bull itself was propagated largely in spite of him.

And just as the Bull had no co-ordinated dissemination, so it had no fixed and invariable meaning. Only slowly did it attain the status of binding law for those procedures which it purported to regulate: Charles IV himself set it aside at need. Eberhard Holtz traces the ambivalence with which, even a century after its issue, the Habsburg Frederick III (r. 1440-93) still approached the Bull, transcribing it into his personal register, drawing upon it, appealing to it, but also at times disregarding it.⁵⁹ Marie-Luise Heckmann demonstrates how successive late medieval generations interpreted Charles's constitution differently, each reflecting the problems and perspectives of their day. By turns a privilege, an imperial decree regulating elections, and an exposition of the constitutional dualism of emperor and princes, the Bull's durability lay in its wide scope for diverse readings.⁶⁰ And as Arno Buschmann shows, this durability proved impressive indeed.⁶¹ Into the eighteenth century, the Golden Bull remained the subject of learned exposition: the *Vollständige Erläuterung* of Johann Peter Ludewig (1716, 1719), ran to three volumes and nearly 2,500 pages. Almost to the end of the *Reich*, successive generations of commentators evolved new ways of understanding the venerable text. They did not lack thoughtful readers. As Michael Niedermeier shows, Goethe himself was familiar not only with the text of the Bull but with Olenschlager's constitutional-historical gloss upon it (1766).⁶²

⁵⁸ For numbers, see M.-L. Heckmann, 'Zeitnahe Wahrnehmung und internationale Ausstrahlung: die Goldene Bulle Karls IV. im ausgehenden Mittelalter mit einem Ausblick auf die Frühe Neuzeit', in *GB* 2: 933-1042 (here p. 934).

⁵⁹ E. Holtz, 'Die Goldene Bulle Karls IV. im Politikverständnis von Kaiser und Kurfürsten während der Regierungszeit Friedrichs III. (1440-1493)', in *GB* 2: 1043-69.

⁶⁰ Its changing meanings are summarised in Heckmann, 'Zeitnahe Wahrnehmung', p. 972.

⁶¹ A. Buschmann, 'Die Rezeption der Goldenen Bulle in der Reichspublizistik des Alten Reiches', in *GB* 2: 1071-1119 (here esp. pp. 1093-94).

⁶² M. Niedermeier, 'Goethe und die Goldene Bulle', in *GB* 2: 1121-35.

VI

A number of essays, adopting a perspective which has become popular among German medievalists since 1978, view the Golden Bull and its author within a wider, European – and sometimes explicitly Europeanist – frame. Werner Maleczek searches, predictably, largely in vain, for thoughtful and fair-minded contemporary judgements on the *Reich*, and particularly on its German inhabitants, from the pens of their neighbours.⁶³ Good Europeans turn out to be in disappointingly short supply, with 'very partial, superficial, cliché-ridden' accounts the norm.⁶⁴ Michael Borgolte strains to see in the Bull, and in other constitutional texts of its day, potential reassurance for future authors of a common European constitution.⁶⁵ Yet the character of the Empire ensured that, set beside Magna Carta or the Hungarian Golden Bull of 1222, Charles's great enactment looked forward to a special degree to a distant future. For, given the multi-ethnic makeup of the *Reich*, its historical role was not, as was the case for comparable texts in neighbouring realms, to nurture the long-term development of a political nation, but rather to thwart it.

That we should remember it with respect, without overlooking its drawbacks, is all the more fitting for early twenty-first-century Europeans, given that it did not contribute to the success of the European national state, which – despite significant advances – has brought the people of our continent such interminable suffering.⁶⁶

Not only the emperor himself but the Golden Bull was, in this judgement, peculiarly and precociously 'European'. Just as in times past, then, the Bull continues to be called upon in some quarters to underpin contemporary world-views and legitimise contemporary political projects.

Charles IV himself appears in these essays, in keeping with the trends of recent decades, as a more *communautaire* monarch than he was painted in some of the older German scholarship. Conflict and confrontation now play a smaller part in the story. Stefan Weiß thus rejects the staple view that the Golden Bull represented a silent attack upon papal claims to confirm the king-elect (that he is the only contributor to

⁶³ W. Maleczek, 'Das Reich im 14. Jahrhundert – Blicke von außen', in *GB* 2: 563-98.

⁶⁴ Maleczek, 'Das Reich im 14. Jahrhundert – Blicke von außen', p. 566.

⁶⁵ M. Borgolte, 'Die Goldene Bulle als europäisches Grundgesetz', in *GB* 2: 599-618 (here p. 618).

⁶⁶ Borgolte, 'Die Goldene Bulle als europäisches Grundgesetz', p. 618.

these volumes to engage in depth with this old-favourite theme is itself eloquent testimony to changing priorities).⁶⁷ In support, he points to the legitimising presence of a cardinal at the Metz assembly, arguing that the matter of confirmation had simply ceased to be a significant one at the Curia by this date. In the same spirit, Weiß refuses to endorse the accustomed view of the choice of Metz as a meeting-place as aimed at countering French encroachments on the Empire's western frontier. Instead, he finds amity and kinship to be the prevailing themes in the emperor's dealings with the house of Valois at his Christmas court.⁶⁸

Charles's own status within these volumes benefits from the breadth of the comparative frame – no longer confined to the institutionalised kingdoms of the Latin west, the Empire's traditional yardstick – within which he is viewed. Franz Tinnefeld thus finds, not perhaps surprisingly, that the Luxemburger cuts rather an impressive figure when seen beside his enfeebled counterpart in the crisis-stricken East Roman empire of Byzantium (though Tinnefeld's contention, that the emperor proved himself a 'Mehrer des Reiches', would certainly not have commanded the unanimous assent of Charles's contemporaries).⁶⁹ Ulrike Hohensee highlights his success in the princely politics of east-central Europe, where his close connections in the west – notably at the Avignon Curia – gave him a clear edge in dealings with competitor-dynasties.⁷⁰ Charles's old-established status as master-diplomatist (and tireless traveller) is duly shown to be intact. Pursuing the trans-European vision on a deeper, more structural level tends, however, to yield a more familiar picture, highlighting particularly those things which set the *Reich* apart.

Comparison of the style of rule of this most French-oriented of emperors with developments beyond his western frontier features prominently in more than one essay. Martin Kintzinger juxtaposes Charles's 'staging' of his monarchy with that of his nephew, Charles V of France, while Bernd Schneidmüller examines the Golden Bull alongside the

⁶⁷ S. Weiß, 'Das Papsttum, Frankreich und das Reich: die Goldene Bulle und die Außenpolitik Karls IV.', in *GB* 2: 917-30 (here pp. 926-27).

⁶⁸ Weiß, 'Das Papsttum, Frankreich und das Reich: Die Goldene Bulle und die Außenpolitik Karls IV.', p. 929.

⁶⁹ F. Tinnefeld, 'Mehrer des Reiches oder Verwalter des Niederganges? Ein Vergleich kaiserlicher Macht zur Zeit Karls IV. im Abendland und in Byzanz', in *GB* 2: 619-37.

⁷⁰ U. Hohensee, 'Herrschartreffen und Heiratspolitik: Karl IV., Ungarn und Polen', in *GB* 2: 639-64.

French king's *Ordonnances* of 1374.⁷¹ Yet the prevailing impression conveyed by these pieces is of the distinctive qualities, in European comparison, of the late medieval *Reich*. If the repertoire of forms and motifs deployed by the French and imperial monarchs was in many ways similar, their realms, and the constitutional foundations of their power, nevertheless exhibited striking differences. Contrasts with the Empire, albeit only implicit, are also suggested by an essay by Sławomir Gawlas, investigating the relative importance of principles of election and heredity in the creation of Polish kings between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries.⁷² Although, as Gawlas and other contributors remind the reader, there was nothing remarkable about election as such playing a part in the elevation of kings, the closely-defined, privileged and regulated college of seven set out in the Golden Bull remained unparalleled.

A further substantial sub-group of contributors (Marie-Luise Favreau-Lilie, Uwe Ludwig and Antonella Ghignoli) concentrates upon Charles's involvements in Italy, while Flaminia Pichiorri's study of the emperor's diplomatic personnel also pays special regard to the provisions which he made while south of the Alps.⁷³ Yet there is perhaps a danger that, in shunning the nationalistically-flavoured parochialism of old, studies of the Luxemburger have now begun to spend just a little too long in scanning remote horizons. In the whole of his long reign, it should be remembered, Charles himself spent only a few months in the south. For all his famed cosmopolitanism, his was fundamentally a northern (and north-eastern) *Reich*. Reception of his most famous document acknowledges that fact. Almost all the late medieval manuscripts of the Golden Bull were written, and found their first homes, within the Empire's northern territories, a clear majority of them in the remaining imperial heartlands of southern Germany.⁷⁴ Nor did its late medieval

⁷¹ M. Kintzinger, 'Das inszenierte Imperium: Kaiser Karl IV. und König Karl V. von Frankreich', in *GB* 1: 299-326; Schneidmüller, 'Inszenierungen und Rituale'.

⁷² S. Gawlas, 'Das Erb- und Wahlrecht des Herrschers in Polen im 14. Jahrhundert', in *GB* 2: 665-712.

⁷³ M.-L. Favreau-Lilie, 'Die Mächte Italiens und das Reich in der Zeit Karls IV.: Historische Realität und Geschichtsbilder um 1500', in *GB* 2: 737-59; U. Ludwig, 'Kreuzzug und Reichsvikariat: zu den Beziehungen zwischen Karl IV. und Venedig', in *GB* 2: 761-803; A. Ghignoli, 'Italienische Forschungen und Urkundeneditionen zur Zeit Karls IV.', in *GB* 2: 805-34; F. Pichiorri, 'Die Rekrutierung diplomatischen Personals unter Karl IV.: Zeitphasen und Verfahrensweisen', in *GB* 2: 835-67.

⁷⁴ Heckmann, 'Zeitnahe Wahrnehmung', p. 937.

readers generally bring to the text the European breadth of outlook that some contributors to these volumes would evidently favour. Peter von Andlau, the Bull's earliest serious commentator (1460), concluded that the electors acted on behalf of the German people (to whom the Roman Empire had been translated) and that therefore only Germans should be raised to the throne.⁷⁵

VII

It will be some time yet before it becomes possible clearly to judge how far, and in what ways, the most recent round of anniversaries and their rich accompanying publications have shifted perceptions of the Golden Bull and of the reign and achievements of its principal author. That a clear picture remains at this stage elusive is a reflection in part of the sheer number of important studies to appear in the past few years. Among these, the two volumes of essays on the Golden Bull are surely guaranteed a distinguished place. However, the uncertainty facing the reader also reflects the absence from recent work of a strong interpretative viewpoint on the late medieval *Reich*, beyond a recurrent desire among German medievalists to insist upon its 'European' character and importance. Instead, what stands out, in the Golden Bull essays but also in other recent studies, are not so much new findings or fundamental reassessments as new angles of approach. Most notable among these is the burgeoning interest in political communications, and particularly in the political role of non-textual media.⁷⁶

The two Golden Bull volumes extend this approach to Charles IV's great constitution and its political hinterlands with impressive effect. But while the articulation of political images and doctrines in diverse media has been widely studied in recent years, the time is surely now ripe to examine more closely the extent of their contemporary reception and, most importantly, to evaluate their effects. Several contributors to the Golden-Bull volumes do indeed consider questions of audience, both for the Bull itself and for other representations of Charles's monarchy. However, the effectiveness of Caroline image-making still awaits a more critical assessment than it generally receives here. Despite the remarkable scale of his persuasive efforts, the emperor's contemporaries and immediate successors were far less wholeheartedly admiring of his rule

⁷⁵ Buschmann, 'Die Rezeption der Goldenen Bulle', p. 1074.

⁷⁶ On political communications, see also now *Politische Öffentlichkeit im Spätmittelalter*, ed. M. Kintzinger and B. Schneidmüller (Ostfildern, 2011).

than the contributors to these volumes mostly tend to be. Why that should have been the case remains well worth pondering.

It may be, moreover, that within the current scholarly vogue for monarchical *Inszenierung*, texts themselves have received less than their due. The Golden Bull had important consequences for the immediate and long-term distribution of power in the German lands of the *Reich*. These consequences are not all observable simply from the study of its rituals. Indeed, its ritual order, which placed the emperor clearly at the head of the imperial hierarchy, served to some degree to mask the effect of provisions which reinforced the material power of the princes, or, at least, of a small, select group among them. On the whole, the political consequences of the Golden Bull, by no means wholly favourable to the power of the monarch, receive surprisingly little attention in these essays. Little is said, for example, about the impact of Charles's constitution upon those dynasties which now found themselves definitively outside the charmed circle. The Austrian *Privilegium maius* (1358-59), an audacious bundle of forgeries ascribing quasi-electoral distinction to the Habsburg dukes, must be judged as much a consequence of the Nuremberg and Metz assemblies (from which the Habsburgs were conspicuously absent) as the Bull itself. It is the sort of document which might appropriately have received a little more scrutiny in a collection such as this.⁷⁷

The contributors are much concerned with the matter of late medieval political communications. On the whole, their concentration is upon the mobile 'centre' represented by the imperial court, with its focus in the person of the monarch. However, the evidence which they bring forth points towards a much more complex communicative process, in which a host of other actors were also significantly involved. Reports of the assemblies at Nuremberg and Metz mostly gave little hint of the great constitution drawn up there; yet knowledge of the document seems rapidly to have become fairly widespread in Germany. Very few originals were issued by the imperial chancery; yet within a comparatively short time-span numerous texts of the Bull were in existence, as a consequence of processes in which the court was no more than peripherally involved. It may now be time for students of the political culture of the late-medieval *Reich* to turn away from the monarch and his immediate followers for a while, to consider more intensively those

⁷⁷ Though Habsburg reaction to the Bull is not altogether neglected: thus, Lindner, "Theatrum praecminentiae", pp. 188-92.

elements in German society at large which helped to nurture and sustain the imperial idea. For it was not primarily at the monarchical centre but at many other diverse locations within the varied political landscapes of the Empire's northern lands that the Golden Bull came to be endowed with significance – and thus, to attain its remarkable longevity.

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